

Theresa Rice

From: Bainbridge Citizens [gary@tripp.net]
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To: Theresa Rice
Subject: Planning Commission - Save Our Shoreline

To the Planning Commission

Save our shoreline from what? | Guest Column | by Gary Tripp

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We all agree we want to save our shoreline. There is none among us who disagrees, especially shoreline homeowners. We who live on the shoreline think it is an honor to live where we do. Every morning when I look out at the water I get a great sense of being directly connected to the Sound and its changing tapestry of waves, birds and boats.

Part of owning waterfront property is the desire to pass it along to our children or to someone else who will appreciate it and love the island the way we do.

We always act in a way to preserve and protect our property, the shoreline and the health of Puget Sound. We are very proud of our healthy Bainbridge beaches. We are not the problem.

So what is the problem? Why do we need to Save Our Shoreline and from what? The health of Puget Sound is affected by: government regulation of dams and culverts that block spawning habitat; sewage and industrial pollution; over-harvesting of fish, clams and kelp; and storm-water runoff.

None of these are controlled by shoreline homeowners. What we can do is to force our government to correct the problems within their control. We control our storm-water runoff; we keep our septic systems in good repair; and I, for one, don't use any chemicals on my property nor do any of my neighbors. Why are we the problem?

Those who oppose our traditional shoreline homes and uses seem to do so either through a misunderstanding of the science, which shows near-zero impact from waterfront homes, envy, or a desire to return the shoreline to the way it was before settlers arrived here a century and a half ago.

Play areas for kids and adults, places to gather and enjoy being close to the water, and the right to have a dock, a boat and a swim float – these are not environmental problems.

These uses are what create our appreciation of the shoreline and our desire to preserve it. Those who oppose these traditional uses within the proposed Shoreline Standard Buffer would replace these uses with trees and bushes – things that would prevent active recreation and push us away from the shoreline.

The science does not show a correlation between stressors – their word for bulkheads, lawns and docks – and any measurable impact to the beaches or environment.

Some oppose bulkheads used to prevent the sea from eroding the land. Property owners have the right to protect their property from erosion.

The theory is that beaches in Puget Sound – but nowhere else in the world – are unstable and, unless fed by material from the uplands, will degrade, decrease in elevation and increase in coarseness. But that is just a theory, not science.

The theory is falsified by observations and studies. Bulkheads have protected property from erosion and, after 100 years and with 59 percent of the Bainbridge shoreline having bulkheads, the city has not shown our bulkheads have caused a problem. The points and spits have not decreased in size and the sand in front of the bulkheads is as fine or finer than elsewhere on the beach. I invite you to walk the beach and see for yourself.

The Herrera buffer science memo just released lists all the beneficial attributes of a natural shoreline and undeveloped uplands, and from this it suggests creating buffers of 35- to 150-foot around the entire island for wildlife habitat and open space. That would mean shoreline properties would be converted to public use instead of private use.

Homeowners try to live as lightly on the land as possible and it is unfair and unrealistic to compare developed property with a nature preserve. It would be unwise to dramatically change the way we use our residential shoreline property.

Of course developed property is not the same as property in its natural state, but then neither is your home or apartment, road or sidewalk, lawn or garden. We have publicly owned natural beaches, forests and parks, but we all agree taking one man's home or front yard, even for something as desirable as a nature preserve, is wrong.

Let's work together to get government to fix the problems that are within its control.

Gary Tripp is director of Bainbridge Citizens and a member of the SMP Citizen Advisory Committee on Vegetation